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Exempt all spy agencies from FOI, Casey asks

Washington (AP)—CIA Director William J. Casey asked Congress yesterday to exempt all U.S. intelligence agencies from the federal Freedom of Information Act.

Mr. Casey told a Senate Judiciary subcommittee that the FOI law has seriously jeopardized U.S. relations with other nations and put the intelligence agency's network of covert agents "in jeopardy."

The law—which permits scholars, journalists and citizens to obtain information about government operations—"has never been an effective method for oversight of the intelligence community," Mr. Casey testified.

But Morton H. Halperin, a former official of the National Security Council, told the subcommittee that the CIA "is a better institution and . . . is more responsive to the dictates of the Constitution" because of the law.

Mr. Halperin, who testified on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union, said the information act has brought public disclosure of valuable information about the CIA, including new revelations about the Bay of Pigs operations in the 1960s, use of mind-drug experiments and illegal surveillance of Americans.

Mr. Halperin now is director of the Center for National Security Studies, which publishes reports on intelligence abuses.

Senator Alfonse M. D'Amato (R, N.Y.) has introduced legislation to partially exempt the CIA and other intelligence agencies from FOI coverage.

But Mr. Casey, arguing that intelligence organizations should be free of all requirements of the act, said, "it has seriously impaired the operation of the intelli-

gence apparatus with no significant public benefit."

Since 1974, when Congress enacted provisions requiring CIA compliance with the law, the agency has handled 1,212 FOI requests at a cost of \$3 million, an effort that drew highly trained and experienced intelligence officers away from other work of greater importance, Mr. Casey said.

The 1974 provisions allow those seeking information to ask federal judges to reverse an agency refusal to meet a request. Mr. Casey conceded that only once in 198 cases has a judge overruled the CIA, and that case is on appeal.

But the CIA occasionally has let information that it should have kept secret "slip out accidentally," Mr. Casey said.